



COUNCIL FOR NATIVE HAWAIIAN ADVANCEMENT

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Testimony of Jade Danner
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Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
In the Hearing on S. 147
the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act
On March 1, 2005

Aloha Honorable Chairman McCain, Vice Chairman Dorgan and distinguished members of the Committee on Indian Affairs. My name is Jade Danner and I am the Director of Government Affairs and Community Consultation for the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA). It is an honor to be invited to testify on this important legislation, the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act, S. 147. With me is Mr. Tony Sang, a member of our 15-member Board of Directors, and the Chairman for the State Council of Hawaiian Homestead Associations (SCHHA). He is a retired fireman from the Honolulu Fire Department, where he served for 28 years.

Mr. Sang's organization, the SCHHA, represents 24 homestead communities and over 30,000 Native Hawaiian beneficiaries of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act which Congress enacted in 1920. These communities have been a stronghold for Native Hawaiian language, culture and people, playing a significant role in bringing our people back from the brink of extinction. Attached to my written testimony is a letter of authorization from the SCHHA to also speak on their behalf today.

I was born shortly after self-determination was instituted as official U.S. policy towards its Native peoples and have seen the incredible transformation that resulted. Born on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations, in Tuba City, Arizona, I have lived 25 years among the Inupiat Eskimos in Barrow, Alaska. I am Native Hawaiian, living on Hawaiian Home Lands in Waimanalo. I graduated from the Kamehameha Schools in Hawaii, and returned to Arizona to study English and Political Science at Arizona State University. My son, Alapai, is Native Hawaiian and Inupiat. He is an enrolled member of the Native Village of Barrow, a federally recognized tribe. A part of my kuleana, my responsibilities, is to provide Alapai's generation and future generations with an increased ability to live by the teachings of our ancestors.

The Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement is a member-based, nonprofit organization aimed at improving access to information and resources by the Native Hawaiian community and the organizations that serve it. To that end, we organize and conduct informational and capacity-building workshops, provide technical assistance, and put on the largest annual conference dedicated to Native Hawaiian community development. CNHA has 130 members, ranging from small community-based organizations, including homestead associations, Hawaiian civic clubs and hula halau, to large statewide nonprofit service organizations addressing education, health, housing and job training and employment, and private beneficial trusts. CNHA is the training and technical assistance provider for the Administration for Native Americans in the Pacific, a

region that includes Hawaii, Guam, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa.

With respect to this bill alone, CNHA has conducted over 50 workshops attended by more than 5,000 members of the Native Hawaiian community in Hawaii and across the continental United States, Hawaii's business community and the community at large. We have 10 additional workshops scheduled to discuss S. 147. Our distributed materials are comprehensive, providing community members with the actual text of the bill, a comparative analysis of the various versions that have been before the Congress and an introduction to the framework of federal Indian law. We firmly believe in educating our community about this very important legislation, and our surveys indicate that as the community's access to accurate information increases, so does their understanding of the issue, and their support for federal recognition of a government-to-government relationship. We believe that an informed community results in a more engaged community.

From our consultation with the Native Hawaiian community and organizations like the SCHHA, there is a clear consensus in our community that the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act must be passed into law or Native Hawaiians will begin to lose what matters most—our identity as a distinct people and our ability to carry that identity into the future. As the Committee on Indian Affairs knows, tremendous healing can occur when Native peoples are empowered to forge their own solutions.

There is overwhelming support in Hawaii for recognizing a Native Hawaiian government as a vehicle to enhanced self-determination. This Committee's own hearing conducted in Hawaii in August 2000 demonstrates the strength of the support, where more than 91% of the testimony submitted supported passage of the bill that first proposed the substance of S. 147. We do not expect unanimity among all Native Hawaiians or among everyone in Hawaii on this issue and believe that it would be unreasonable to expect such before moving forward with passage of S. 147.

Today, there are over 160 federal public laws addressing the conditions of Native Hawaiians and affirming the trust relationship. Several public laws already authorize programming and appropriations to address concerns in the areas of Native Hawaiian health, education, housing, cultural and language preservation, and to enhance self-determination. Private beneficial trusts also contribute to Native Hawaiian well-being in the areas of education, elder care, and child welfare. We have managed to rebuild some of what was lost as a result of our history through diligence, innovation and partnering. Commissioner Quanah Crossland Stamps of the Administration for Native Americans has often commented on how well Native Hawaiians bring together resources through diverse partnering to bear on a given project. As the American Indian and Alaska Native experience has demonstrated, however, resources alone are not enough.

I cannot emphasize enough the absolute need for Native Hawaiian self-governance. I know, from my own experience as the Director of Social Services for a federally recognized tribe in Alaska, the tremendous positive change Native peoples can make for themselves if empowered to do so. Self-governance is a powerful tool for Native peoples to heal and continue to move

forward in a self-determining manner. Indian Country Today recently released an article about a study conducted by the Harvard American Indian Project in which one of the study's authors, Professor Joseph P. Kalt, states, "If you look at the policy of self-determination, you would conclude that it is the best policy in 100 or 200 years for solid progress in taking the tribes out of poverty." Native Hawaiians need full access to this policy so that we can make solid progress of our own.

It is vital for our survival as a distinct thread in the human fabric that we have autonomy in our internal affairs, and be empowered in meaningful ways to forge our own solutions. The Apology Resolution, P.L. 103-150, provides an accurate account of Hawaii's history and its entry into the Union, and commits the United States to commencing the much-needed process of reconciliation. It is a history that I will not belabor here, but suffice it to say that our experience and circumstance are no different than that of many Native American peoples. As a result, our current conditions, from poor health to impoverished communities, to homelessness and overcrowding, are much the same. Despite these adversities, our hope and faith in the American system remains.

Like other Native Americans, we continue to honor and fulfill our responsibilities as American citizens. I am proud to say that 10 members of the Hawaii State Legislature, a significant portion of the Governor's administration, including the Lt. Governor, and one of our two U.S. Senators are Native Hawaiian. Many of our sons and daughters have committed their lives to military service, some rising to the highest ranks.

Two years ago, CNHA partnered with the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and others to work with this committee to honor the service of Native American veterans. Mike Irwin from AFN tells a story about how the Native Hawaiians were the last to confirm which of our veterans would speak on the panel. He said, "What's the problem? Don't they have any veterans?" When we finally submitted two names for the panel, Mike said, "So the problem wasn't in finding a veteran to speak, it was in choosing between the four-star general, the rear admiral and the reservist who pulled people out of the Pentagon on 9-11."

Like other Native Americans, we understand that in addition to these individual responsibilities, we have a collective responsibility from time immemorial, to perpetuate Native Hawaiian culture, language, knowledge and traditions—our very way of life—for generations to come. It is this obligation that we need your help to fulfill. We need empowerment to make our own decisions about our own internal affairs, our own family relations, our own systems of justice and reconciliation, and our own resources.

We need the tool to formulate and implement solutions, and the power to hold ourselves accountable to the results. We need parity in policy among America's first peoples, most simply, because we do not exist anywhere else in the world. Our culture was born here, lives here, and nowhere else. If denied self-determination and self-governance in Hawaii, in our motherland, then we are sure to go the way of so many other cultures native to these shores and now

extinct—a memory, a sad and regrettable story in this great nation’s history, irrevocably lost to the world.

We know some have concerns about the issues of gaming or the taking of resources from other recognized tribes. We believe that those concerns are addressed by the current version of the bill. We do not seek recognition of a government-to-government relationship in order to do gaming, Senators, or because we want to take resources from the Indian pot.

Earnestly, these issues are not the motivation for our seeking passage of this bill. We seek it for a more basic reason. We want to be at the helm of our own collective future. We want the United States to honor its trust relationship with us, and to engage fully in the United States policy on self-determination and self-governance. We want to honor our obligation to our ancestors, whose sole purpose for existing at all, was to bring us forward, to bring their knowledge, their beliefs, their way of life forward, just as we exist for our next generations.

Humbly, we ask the members of Congress to pass legislation that empowers us to hold our destiny in our own hands. We ask that you deal with us in a manner that is fair and just. We ask you to pass the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act, and to ensure that it has the necessary provisions to give us control of our own future, so that we may make a place for our next generations and ensure that the Native Hawaiian culture continues to thrive in this world for generations to come.

Mahalo for this opportunity to address the Committee on this important legislation. The Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement looks forward to working with the Committee on passage of this bill, and continued efforts towards reconciliation.